

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND SOCIAL ORDER

A Philosophical Perspective

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Forty four years after the publication of Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* that celebrated "the progressive secularization of the world as the logical outcome of Biblical religion" (Newsweek)¹, we almost feel the bones of religious fundamentalism cracking under the pressure of secularization. At the same time, however, the Hegelian dialectic holds ground as both refuse to be crushed by either; and any compromising stance only begets another rival; to the effect, that it can be said that fundamentalism is never a phenomenon that may be extinguished.

The term "fundamentalist" was first used by a Baptist journalist in 1920 as a badge of honor for those Christians who championed the cause of the Fundamentals, or set of beliefs such as the inerrancy of Scriptures, original sin, the Virgin birth, atonement, resurrection, and Second Coming of Christ that were considered to be basic to Protestant faith. However, soon the liberals began using the word as a term of abuse, associating it with blind ignorance and obscurantism.² In modern times, the term has been extended and generically used to identify a form of religiosity that is prevalent among different religions.³ Thus, we now also talk about Hindu fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Sikh fundamentalism.

There are many rivals to fundamentalism today – scientism, skepticism, existentialism, post-modernism, pluralism, liberalism, and secularism to name a few. Fundamentalism is not without its synonyms either: orthodoxy, conservatism, right-wing,⁴ extremism, and fanaticism, to name a few. Each of the terms does not entirely mean the same though each carries the common meaning of adherence to some original or fundamental beliefs and an attitude that rejects any openness to change regarding the fundamentals or traditionally approved elements. Fundamentalists usually refer to their rivals as infidels, unbelievers, heretics, or apostates; in which sense, it is obvious that the element of faith is central to fundamentalism. Since the fundamentals of different faiths are often at variance with each other, a great number of anti-social instances of religious intolerance, religious violence, and religious terrorism proceed from unexamined fideism and exclusivist sentiments that verge

¹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. Inc., 1975), Cover Page

² Lloyd Geering, *Fundamentalism: the Challenge to the Secular World*, 2003. www.religion-online.org. January 7, 2010.

³ Peter A. Huff, "The Challenge of Fundamentalism for Inter-religious Dialogue", www.crosscurrents.org/Huff.htm, accessed on January 9, 2010.

⁴ In "Fundamentalism around the World", Max L. Stackhouse, Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, pointed out that "It is impossible to predict whether fundamentalism will be left-wing or right-wing" and that "fundamentalism tends to oppose pluralism, preferring authoritarian social structures, whether of the right or the left." *The Christian Century*, August 28-September 4, 1985, pp. 769-771, as e-published on <http://www.religion-online.org>, January 7, 2010.

on fanaticism and extremism. Therefore, fundamentalism has come to be viewed at large with negative connotations and is considered to be an enemy of humanity, science, and progress. An exception is the post-modern phenomenological approach to the study of religious fundamentalism that rejects the modernist perspective as arbitrary. Instead, the emphasis is on an inclusion of fundamentalism as a way among many ways.⁵ The problem with the post-modern view, however, is that its quest for pluralism abolishes its center; as a result, the appreciation is often a mockery of the fundamentalist's faith which she regards to be sacred, central, and absolute.

This paper attempts to evaluate the ontic and epistemic issues related to religious fundamentalism.

1. Ontic Issues

Defining and identifying fundamentalism has been an important problem. Some have suggested that "religious fundamentalism" is an empty and meaningless term employed "by western liberals to refer to a broad spectrum of religious phenomena which have little in common except for the fact that they are alarming to liberals!"⁶ This demonstrates the common view that fundamentalism essentially is a stance against modernism, rationalism, liberalism, and secularism, all of which downplay religious authority in the field of science, ethics, and history. "Fundamentalism" is one of those many abstract terms that faces the problem of paradoxical vagueness;⁷ its line of distinction, not easily definable. One way of categorizing would be to relegate any anti-modernizing stance as fundamentalist, on the assumption that every anti-modernizing stance is so due to an espousal to some absolutist original point. This procedure *via negativa* would hint at the proper essence of fundamentalism, though not entirely in a definitive manner. Yet, this also judges an anti-fundamentalist stance as a departure from some absolutist original point.

1.1. Essence of Fundamentalism. Keeping in view the chief divisions of science, ethics, and history, we may mark three important essentialities that identify a fundamentalist position: orthodoxy, absolutist ethics, and utopian eschatology.

1.1.1. Orthodoxy. While fundamentalism is considered to be largely a phenomenon of the 20th century, due to its selective opposition of modernization, it is also not untrue that the definitive element of orthodoxy was inherent to it, opposing radical reactions of any time, throughout history. That same element refurbishes against modern anti-religious advances in the present times. Orthodoxy may be regarded as the core essence of fundamentalism. Since orthodoxies differ, fundamentalisms also differ. However, an orthodox is not necessarily a fundamentalist. The difference lies in the defining attitude. Orthodoxy is mere

⁵ Peter A. Huff, "The Challenge of Fundamentalism for Inter-religious Dialogue", www.crosscurrents.org/Huff.htm, accessed on January 9, 2010.

⁶ Woodhead, L. and Heelas, P. (eds.) 'Introduction to Chapter Two: Religions of Difference', *Religion in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.32; as cited by Jeff Haynes, "Religious Fundamentalism and Politics", Scribd.com (2009). Peter Herriot, *Religious Fundamentalism: Global, Local, Personal* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.2

⁷ An example of paradoxical vagueness is Sorites Paradox which asks the question: How many grains must be removed from a heap in order to no longer make it a heap? There are no boundary lines where a heap stops being a heap.

subscription to faith; fundamentalism, unconditional subjection to faith. Orthodoxy can be open; fundamentalism, always closed. Orthodoxy is generally traditional; fundamentalism, usually radical. Orthodoxy is chiefly belief; fundamentalism, concern. Thus, it would be appropriate to define fundamentalism, in this relation, as the unconditional embracement of orthodoxy. The other synonyms being "conservatism" (conserving the original and opposing change) and "traditionalism" (truth is communicated through tradition), "orthodoxy" refers to a rigid subscription to the original teachings of one's religion; and, by "original" is meant the first form in which the religion is thought to have appeared. While holding on to orthodox belief, fundamentalists don't just regard modernization as a threat to religion; they regard it as an evil. Generally speaking, they do not oppose the advancement of modern science (for even fundamentalists make use of modern equipments), but oppose that propagation of those secular and liberal views that are considered doctrinally blasphemous and socially destructive.

The fundamentalist opposition of modernism and liberalism is not without reason. For instance, in *Orthodoxy* (1908), G. K. Chesterton critiques modernism as a sophist exercise in rootlessness; he writes:

Liberalism has been degraded into liberality. Men have tried to turn "revolutionise" from a transitive to an intransitive verb. The Jacobin could tell you not only the system he would rebel against, but (what was more important) the system he would *not* rebel against, the system he would trust. But the new rebel is a sceptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it. Thus he writes one book complaining that imperial oppression insults the purity of women, and then he writes another book (about the sex problem) in which he insults it himself. He curses the Sultan because Christian girls lose their virginity, and then curses Mrs. Grundy because they keep it. As a politician, he will cry out that war is a waste of life, and then, as a philosopher, that all life is waste of time. A Russian pessimist will denounce a policeman for killing a peasant, and then prove by the highest philosophical principles that the peasant ought to have killed himself. A man denounces marriage as a lie, and then denounces aristocratic profligates for treating it as a lie. He calls a flag a bauble, and then blames the oppressors of Poland or Ireland because they take away that bauble. The man of this school goes first to a political meeting, where he complains that savages are treated as if they were beasts; then he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting, where he proves that they practically are beasts. In short, the modern revolutionist, being an infinite sceptic, is always engaged in undermining his own mines. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.⁸

Similarly, in his 1970 bestseller *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler had warned:

⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1908), Project Gutenberg Ebook#16769, Gutenberg.net, Sept 28, 2005

Take an individual out of his own culture and set him down suddenly in an environment sharply different from his own, with a different set of cues to react to – different conceptions of time, space, work, love, religion, sex, and everything else – then cut him off from any hope of retreat to a more familiar social landscape, and the dislocation he suffers is doubly severe. Moreover, if this new culture is itself in constant turmoil, and if – worse yet – its values are incessantly changing, the sense of disorientation will be still further intensified. Given few clues as to what kind of behavior is rational under the radically new circumstances, the victim may well become a hazard to himself and others.

Now imagine not merely an individual but an entire society, an entire generation – including its weakest, least intelligent, and most irrational members – suddenly transported into this new world. The result is mass disorientation, future shock on a grand scale.

This is the prospect that man now faces. Change is avalanching upon our heads and most people are grotesquely unprepared to cope with it.⁹

The primary opposers of change are, of course, the fundamentalists. It is common to label all such opposers as barbarian; but, it is also expected of an incoming hurricane to evoke the reassessment of anchors. Thus, while on one hand, it is argued that fundamentalism is destructive of social order, the fundamentalists contend that it is liberalism that is socially destructive. It is this apprehension that motivates political reactions, if any, in order to stall undesired invasion.¹⁰ The evil of fundamentalism, however, lies in its tending towards extremism through the epistemic practice of closed exclusivism that idolizes rigid orthodoxy at the expense of true spiritual freedom that truth brings.

Much of fundamentalist behavior focuses on protecting the form of religion that a group considers to be genuine but threatened by anti-forces.

1.1.2. Absolutist Ethics. Ethics is an important part of fundamentalism. It determines the functionary basis of fundamentalist behavior. Orthodoxy establishes the deontological grounds of absolutist ethics for fundamentalism. If not for the givenness of the absolutes, pragmatism would undermine the ontic essentiality of fundamentalism. With reference to fundamentalism, ethical sources may be divided into at least two categories: Canon and Tradition.

1.1.2.1. Canon. Certain sacred texts recognized as authoritative define the fundamentality of ethics, and even where canonical texts do not exist, some equivalent form does exist as an unquestionable source of authority.¹¹ While the humanitarian

⁹ Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), pp.11,12

¹⁰ Cp. Jeff Haynes, "Religious Fundamentalism and Politics", "Christian fundamentalism in the United States is closely linked to conservative political forces seeking to reverse what they perceive as excessive liberalisation and relaxation of social and moral mores, believed to be the root cause of what has gone wrong in American society since the 'swinging 60s'"

¹¹ For instance, Sinhala-Buddhist fundamentalism does not have a sacred text, but the *Mahavamsa* does serve as the authoritative guide for relations with State and society. Cf. Review by Mavis L. Fenn of *Buddhist*

conformities of some of the principles are no problem for people in general, it is the divisive and negative value of certain injunctions that pose fundamentalism as a problem. Modern liberationists (the oppressed classes, feminists, modernists) consider canonical ethics as not unquestionable. In modern India, for instance, the injunctions given by the *Manusmriti* would be deigned as oppressive by *Dalits* and feminists alike. Similarly, one finds certain texts in the Koran as highly intolerant, violent, and misdirected; for instance,

The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled out of the land. Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be an awful doom (Sura V. 33).

Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful (Sura IX. 5).¹²

While liberal interpretation disregards the significance of such injunctions for modern world, there are those who wish to carry out the command to the letter. Clearly then, literal interpretation and liberal interpretation are two poles at variance, the former favored by fundamentalists and the latter by their opponents. Deeply etched into this practice is the belief in the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, an important constituent of fundamentalist epistemology. The liberal, on the other hand, values the text against the ethics of highest reason; thus, while Plato admits the importance of religion in *The Republic*, he argues that the epics are theologically flawed and proposes that we "put an end to such tales, lest they engender laxity of morals among the young."¹³ The fundamentalist, however, would maintain that the jettisoning of canonical authority would destabilize the validity of any law for a person, and so ethics would become anarchic. The canon serves as the indisputable source of truth for the fundamentalist.

1.1.2.2. Tradition. By "tradition" is meant a set of beliefs, customs and practices that have existed for a long time and have been socially or filially handed over to a generation. It also refers to a body of inferences or interpretations drawn through engagement with the text to answer questions raised by a specific context. In certain instances, religious reformers have stood against the traditions and called for a return to the original. Jesus Christ said to the Jews: "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9). Yet, in general, people follow the pattern of social mimesis, and usually stay committed to their traditions. Such commitment to tradition exemplifies a kind of social reliance in which consensus serves as the norm for thought and action. Pointing at the power of consensus over individual convictions, James F. Ross writes:

Cognition is more a corporate, collective state than we might have noticed....
Convictions are socially acquired and widely shared. We are taught to believe doctors,

Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka by Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 6 (1999), pp 17-24

¹² *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, trans. M. M. Pickthall (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1992)

¹³ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 79

dentists, and various specialists. That's why they use white-coated actors in toothpaste advertisements. Fashions in clothes, cars, housing, furniture, travel (and every where else, including intellectual ones) involve the individual's willing identification with a group, including the adoption of conforming beliefs, to provide the satisfaction and self-esteem and, perhaps, open admiration available. There are patterns of individual awareness and desires, with resulting beliefs, that are generational, national, and even cultural. Convictors transmit, or defeat, moral virtue, intellectual virtue and even mental and public health.¹⁴

Traditions manifest as different sects, schools, and denominations of a single religion. Fundamentalists certainly differ in accordance to the school or group they belong to. Thus, there are Sunni fundamentalists, Evangelical fundamentalists, and Theravada fundamentalists.

1.1.2.3. Utopian Eschatology. Fundamentalism looks to the future and this vision produces the passion that is characteristic of it. The future outlook determines the way one engages with one's immediate world. Almond and others mark four different ways in which the fundamentalist engages in the world: world conqueror, world transformer, world creator, and world renouncer. The *world conqueror* uses any means (even violence) to bring the world into subjection of his religion, the *world transformer* believes that inner transformation is more important than outward conversion and so engages in the art of persuasion to change perspectives, the *world creator* offers an alternative world to the sinner who has rejected God and invites others into it, the *world renouncer* withdraws from the world to live a private religious life.¹⁵

Eschatological orientation serves as the teleological basis of fundamentalist ethics and mission, since the present acts are tied in to their future rewards or ramifications with regard to things to come. It also functions as a cause-to-live-for in the fundamentalist view of history and the believer's role of significance in it. Eschatology defines the goal of all fundamentalist behavior. The chief form of utopian eschatology that affects social order is Political Utopianism or Kingdom Eschatology. This eschatology is, for example, reflected in the Islamic expectation of the *Mahdi*, the Jewish expectation of the *Messiah*, the Christian expectation of Christ's Second Coming, and the Hindutva quest for Rama Rajya. In Islamic and Hindutva fundamentalism, especially, this quest goes beyond mere expectation to a real engagement in world politics. The role of Christian conservatives to influence government has also been seen in the United States of America.

1.2. Kinds of Fundamentalism. Following the classical Platonic division of society into guardians (ideologists/rulers), auxiliary (warriors), and traders, we may draw three categories (or levels) of fundamentalism, viz. Magisterial Fundamentalism, Militant Fundamentalism, and Mercantile Fundamentalism.

1.2.1. Magisterial Fundamentalism. This refers to the kind of fundamentalism that is centered on an ideology in the form of doctrine or dictum. This is usually the pure form of

¹⁴ James F. Ross, "Rational Reliance" www.sas.upenn.edu/~jross/rationalreliance.htm, accessed on Oct 1, 2010

¹⁵ Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S., & Sivan, E. *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) as referred to by Peter Herriot, *Religious Fundamentalism: Global, Local, Personal* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.45

fundamentalism that focuses on the fundamentals and calls forth for a return to the originals. The key word for this form would be Law. Magisterial fundamentalism expresses itself in verbal and intellectual engagement with various concepts. Examples are Evangelical Christianity, the Arya Samaj, and the Ahmadiyyas.

1.2.2. Militant Fundamentalism. The concern of this form of fundamentalism is identity, territory, and power. This form of fundamentalism often uses physically violent methods to defend or occupy territories or avenge some communal injury. The key word for this form of fundamentalism would be War. Religious fundamentalism involves an identity problem, the existential question of who we are and what we are in relation to the physical and social world. This identity problem is basically philosophical and revolves around few commonalities known as basics or essences of a particular religious group. These commonalities produce tribal feelings that act as social cohesion and set a particular tribe in distinction from, or even in opposition against, others. In modern times, totemism takes clandestine forms through implementation of psychological mechanisms like deindividuation and dehumanization through propaganda and social suggestion.¹⁶ Examples are the Al-Qaeda and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh.

1.2.3. Mercantile Fundamentalism. The keyword for this form of fundamentalism is Profit. This form is utilitarian in nature and promotes fundamentalism not as a cause in itself but as a means to some other goal or advantage. These are not truly fundamentalist in nature but only promote communal tensions to gain advantage of the situation. The persecution of Paul by Demetrius and the other tradesmen of Ephesus, who were losing business because of Paul's preaching, is a good example of this (Acts 19).

2. Epistemics of Religious Fundamentalism

The term "epistemics" was coined by Alvin I. Goldman to contrast it with traditional epistemology that didn't take modern psychological studies in cognition into consideration.¹⁷ For Goldman, on the social arena, epistemics concerns "itself with the interpersonal and institutional processes that affect the creation, transmission, and reception of information, misinformation, and partial information."¹⁸ As such, it would be appropriate to use the term "epistemics of religious fundamentalism" to refer to that branch of philosophical enquiry that deals with active beliefs that fundamentalists hold to be justified and true, and that subjectively and/or intra-socially (within a particular community) appear to justify fundamentalist behaviors. By "active beliefs" is meant those beliefs that readily occur to the mind in the given situation where fundamentalism is obvious.

The fundamentalist faith evinces three epistemic conditions: unconditional submission to authority, existential identity, and closed exclusivism:

¹⁶ See "The Lucifer Effect by Philip Zimbardo", www.lucifereffect.com

¹⁷ Alvin I. Goldman, "Epistemics: The Regulative Theory of Cognition," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75, No. 10, (Oct., 1978), p. 509

¹⁸ Footnote 1, *Ibid*, p. 509

2.1. Unconditional Subjection to Authority. As pointed out earlier, the element of faith is central to fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is a mentality, a mentality of credulity bound to a particular authority. The fundamentals are not arrived at, but are givens. The fundamentals are not inferred truths, but are revealed or transmitted truths. Fundamentalism, therefore, is primarily epistemic in nature since it is governed by an attitude of unquestioning faith. The authority might be written Scriptures, authoritative interpretation thereof, prevailing tradition, or the words of a person (usually a spiritual leader). In Christianity, the authority is the Bible and a literal interpretation thereof; in Hinduism, the *Shastras*; in Islam, the Quran; and in Sikhism, the Guru Granth. It was not a surprise that the Buddhist and Jain schools of philosophy were labeled as *nastik* (unbelieving or heterodox) by the Hindu philosophers when these rejected the authority of *Sabda* (verbal testimony), *Agama* or *Aptavakya* as valid source of knowledge. Various religious groups within a religion may have various sets of what constitute their fundamentals, but the element of faith provides the sense of identity bond. Obviously, the epistemic union of faith-propositions and faith-act is only possible where the subject is sane, sober, and cognizant – to the extent that the essence of his identity, namely his faith, is alive for him.

Since many of the beliefs that we hold come from secondary sources, faith does serve as an important source of knowledge;¹⁹ but, we normally tend to only substantially give in to such data that are certified by a greater number of testimonies, primarily consisting of those facts or reasons that establish the credibility and authority of the secondary source. Still such testimonial credence is conditional and corrigible. But, the unconditionality of fundamentalist faith is incorrigible since the subjection of the faculty of reason has already occurred and psychological factors supersede cognitive ability. For instance, the fear of rejection (through social ostracization for being a heretic) or fear of divine displeasure can prevent a fundamentalist from allowing any question regarding a doctrine to have any voice or significance in her epistemic framework. Certainty in religion is usually a matter of social or, more specifically, communal consensus. Any radical departure poses a threat to the fundamental structure of the prevalent system and raises an opposition; similarly, any opposition of this fundamental structure also engenders social tension. This is where fundamentalism surfaces on the scene and social order is disrupted. The Hegelian dialectic, however, continues as the newer movements themselves assume unconditional fundamentalist structures in process of time. The obvious danger of fundamentalism is when such authoritative pronouncements are blatantly false, and the threat, aggrandized by false propaganda, for whatever reasons.

2.2. Existential Identity. The second mark of fundamentalist faith is the relationship that defines the adherent's or a community's existential identity. The existentiality and finality is evident in the fact that the fundamentalist unquestioningly lives or dies for her ideal. This is evident in the fact that while the Roman Catholic Church was serious in her condemnation of Galileo, Galileo didn't regard his scientific discovery as so serious a cause worthy to die for. The essence of faith defines the existence of the believer. The murk of fundamentalism, however, lies in its unquestioning nature. It doesn't dare to examine its fundamentals, nor is it open to any examination thereof. It is not the fundamentals, then, that form the identity

¹⁹ Cp. "Faith is a source of knowledge, often more efficient and more reliable than finding out for oneself, as the telephone book makes clear." James F. Ross, "Rational Reliance", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 769-798.

of a fundamentalist; it is his unconditional surrender to them. At any cost, the fundamentalist martyr demonstrates a stronger epistemic union than a fundamentalist killer.

A liberal may also give her life for her ideal, but the ideal is a rationally founded existential.²⁰ For instance, the liberal Socrates chose to drink the hemlock when Athens condemned him; he also refused any aid to escape while in prison, because he believed in the rationality of the moral principles he chose to abide by. In the *Apology*, Socrates does point relations to the Oracle of Delphi²¹ as the starting point of his quest for wisdom and also appeals to the “familiar oracle within”, but then equally positions his standing with a calculation of the wager in which he regards death to be an advantage; be it annihilistic or transmigratory.²² The “familiar oracle within” is the intuitive reasoning that he describes in the final part of *Crito* as “the voice which I seem to hear murmuring in my ears” and which he associates with “the intimations of the will of God” that he wished to follow.²³ Though all stated in Plato’s words, the nub of the story lies in Socrates’ statement that “the life which is unexamined is not worth living”, which explained his refusal to be silenced by the brute force of injustice. He could not help being a “gadfly” for this was what defined his existential identity and the intuitive and final ground for any reasonable existence.

The fundamentalist, on the other hand, has no such interest in the liberal philosophical approach. Even hermeneutics is compromised. This distinction is important since the fundamentality of fundamentalism lies in the giving in to the givenness of the givens without any reserves.

2.3. Closed Exclusivism. This theological framework represents a closed world-view. The fundamentalist’s faith disallows any liberality whatsoever. Therefore, inter-religious dialogue as an epistemic reconciliatory has almost little success when it comes to dialogue with fundamentalists, unless the fundamentals are left untouched and harmonious relationships are sought over platforms where inter-communal, social cooperation caters towards to general good. Pluralism doesn’t help much; for, where indisputable authority forms the epistemic basis of a faith, even pluralism, and even inclusivism, is marked by exclusivity. Take, for instance, Krishna’s pronouncement in the *Gita*:

Even those devotees of other gods who worship (them) endowed with faith, worship
Me alone, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), though in an unauthorized way (IX. 23).²⁴

²⁰ Or else, despite its immediate existential utility, it is ultimately absurd and nonsensical. This is clearly portrayed in David Lean’s 1957 Oscar winning movie “The Bridge on the River Kwai” in which a British Colonel Nicholson, held prisoner by the Japanese along with his men, agrees to build the bridge for the Japanese just to boost the morale of his men (immediate existentiality); however, when Major Shears (American) comes, with his men, to blow up the Bridge, Nicholson detects the plot and informs the Japanese commandant Saito, this results in a fight in which not only Shears, Saito, and Nicholson are killed but also the bridge is blown and the incoming train falls into the river. Before Nicholson could realize his mistake, it is too late already. The film ends with the words by Cpl. Plifton, the British Medical Officer, “Madness, madness!”

²¹ Which he also refers to as “the divine command”, Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p.466

²² *Ibid*, pp. 468-470

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 484-485

²⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Swami Vireswarananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974).

The exclusivity is marked by the qualifier “unauthorized” or, as one version renders, “not according to ordinance,”²⁵ that Krishna uses to describe all other ways. Exclusivity in itself, however, is not the mark of fundamentalism. The problem is closed exclusivism, by which is meant a denunciation of epistemic analysis, whereby a clear distinction is drawn and a discontinuity imposed between the secular and the sacred realms of knowledge, in which case we experience the end of reason. The result is a form of closed hermeneutics that is actually defined and authorized by the world-view (pre-understanding), already given, that covers all interpretation of world, events, and scripture. While one may debate whether such occlusion of reason in closed interpretation is justified or not, seeing that testimony-based beliefs often receive justification within the socio-epistemic condition (social reliance, social mimesis, social existentiality, etc)²⁶ that lends credibility to the testimony,²⁷ and it has been argued that truth is not always rational in essence,²⁸ yet, it is inarguable that unity of truth (an essential characteristic) calls for tests of consistency, coherence, and correspondence that can only be possible in an open world-view, i.e. a world-view that is open to substantial verification. However, fundamentalists close themselves to any such examination of faith. The givens cannot be compromised, nor do they concede to anything else that claims to be superior. Fundamentalism, then, is primarily an epistemic attitude that refuses to budge to any other claim at any cost. No wonder, then, that inter-religious dialogues cannot truly occur where the fundamentals in question are radically opposite. However, they are also not usually fruitless when it comes to clarifying some misunderstandings, that do not affect the fundamentals of the faith.²⁹

Conclusion

Fundamentalisms do pose a problem for other fundamentalists and also the non-fundamentalist. This is so because fundamentalisms clash. Inter-religious dialogues may be suggested. But, such must take note of the form of fundamentalism in question. Where the concern is purely mercantile, the only solution would be economic; where the concern is militant, the solution would be negotiation; and where the concern is magisterial, the solution would be apologetic. Since threat is an important concern that provokes fundamentalist reaction, it is also important for advertisers, educationists, and mediamakers to not depict anything iconoclastic without a thorough examination of its socio-ethical, theological, and philosophical dimensions. Liberty is not a license to hurt sentiments. Also, national and international events can be a platform where people from different communities and nationalities participate without feelings of tribal difference, thus

²⁵ S.E. Frost, Jr. (ed.), *The Sacred Writings of the World's Great Religions* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), p. 58

²⁶ Differing according to societies and their epistemic relations; i.e. the way authority is woven into the fabric of social experience, for instance, in some as religious, in some as cultic (relation to a guru), and in some as philosophical. The anti-society nomenclature can be applied to those sections of humanity where individuality, skepticism, iconoclasm, and nihilism are final. The author doesn't think such anti-societies can be totally possible; this may explain why religious faith (and even fundamentalism) grow in counter proportion to skepticism, because a life without faith is unlivable, since man is certainly a social being.

²⁷ A number of viewpoints have been discussed by Peter J. Graham in “Liberal Fundamentalism and its Rivals”, J. Lackey and E. Sosa, (eds.), *The Epistemology of Testimony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp 93-113.

²⁸ Refer, for instance, to Zeno's paradoxes as an anti-argument (he tries to show that experience of plurality is irrational, which in return may also be used to prove that reason is not ultimately a reliable guide for truth that is experienced). The same is also affirmed by mystic teachings such as *Zen Buddhism*.

²⁹ See Arij A. Roest Crollius, SJ, “Interreligious Dialogue: Can it be sincere?” 20 July 2000, accessed on 13 Feb 2010. <http://www.sedos.org/english/Crollius.html>

invalidating anti-communal and totemist feelings and demonstrating the spirit of understanding and harmonious co-existence.

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